



ANIMALS AND CHILDREN: FRIENDS OR FOES?

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND CONSULTATION FOR CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

In the United States alone, millions of people are treated for animal bites annually, with more than 900 reported bites on any single day! Tragically, more than half of these victims are children and many of those children are injured by an animal in a child care facility.

Don't let a child in your care become just another statistic!

Did You Know

Most people would agree that having a pet can be a positive experience. Children delight in hugging, petting and playing with pets and other animals they may encounter. Interaction with animals can provide children with opportunities to learn gentleness, responsibility, nurturance, love, and attachment. Valuable lessons about life, death and grief can also be learned. These experiences and interactions can greatly benefit both children and animals.

A caregiver must be aware that positive experiences don't just magically happen. They require careful supervision, the teaching of animal-handling skills and monitoring of the interactions. When children and animals do come together, caregivers have a *critical responsibility* to protect both the children and the animals from inappropriate behavior and harm that each can cause.

A *safety assessment* of both the animal and the child must be made for their appropriateness to be together. A gentle animal can become dangerous when it protects itself from harmful behaviors by children. A trusting child can be seriously injured by an aggressive or shy animal. *It is critically important that children be directly supervised and monitored during all interactions with animals.*

Don't Take Chances!

Many children and adults mistakenly believe that other animals are as friendly and gentle as their pets. This naive belief is the cause of many preventable injuries. From scratches to bites to serious attacks, animals, in some situations, can be extremely dangerous. To help prevent injuries and enhance positive experiences for both animals and children, there are measures that child care providers can take. Protecting animals from being hurt by children, in turn, protects children from being hurt by animals.

Where Should I Start?

A good beginning starts with determining whether the animal is of suitable temperament and size to be around young children. Your local veterinarian can provide information regarding the appropriateness of specific types or breeds of animals. Furthermore, some insurance companies may not cover child care homes or centers that have aggressive animals. If you determine that a specific animal is suitable to be around the children in your care, you need to take the following steps to assure your animal's safety:

Basic Safety Guidelines To Teach Children

1. Handle an animal only when an adult is able to supervise and assist with the interaction.
2. Always ask permission to touch an animal if it belongs to someone else. Not all animals are as friendly as they may seem!
3. Avoid any animal that is demonstrating aggressive, defensive or avoidance behaviors such as growling, hissing, barking, hiding, or showing its teeth. Children should be taught the signs of an angry or frightened animal. In reverse, angry or aggressive children should not handle an animal until the child's anger or aggression has fully dissipated.
4. Leave the animal alone when it is eating, sleeping, injured, caring for its young, or eliminating body waste. Animals are very territorial and bothering them during these times can cause trouble. Home rules require that an animal's food, litter box and toys be inaccessible to children.
5. Speak softly around animals. Loud voices or screaming may startle animals causing them to be defensive.
6. When approaching an animal, the child should first slowly hold one hand out to let the animal sniff his or her hand, allowing the animal to become familiar with the child's scent.
7. Approach an animal by moving slowly and calmly. Sudden movements may cause the animal to defend itself. Move away in a similar manner. ***It is important that children not run from an animal.***
8. Children should be taught to touch and handle all animals gently. Most animals do not like their stomachs rubbed or their tails pulled. They also do not care to be climbed on, hugged too tightly, hit or dragged around.
9. Teach children to stop when an animal is chasing them! Running away may result in an animal continuing to chase children aggressively. Teach children to stand as still as a tree when being chased. If an animal knocks them down, children should be taught to curl into a ball, protecting their head and face by covering them with their arms.
10. Children should keep their hands and fingers away from an animal's cage or fence. Poking at or throwing objects at caged animals may cause them to react violently. Children should also keep their faces away from the animal's face when petting or playing.

What Should I Do If An Animal Injures A Child In My Care?

Some minor bites and scratches inflicted by animals are not severe enough to require medical attention. However, other animal-inflicted injuries may be severe and even life threatening.

Be Aware!

A number of children are killed each year by animal attacks, while a significantly larger number require medical treatment (such as stitches, antibiotics, tetanus and rabies prevention, and hospitalization). Furthermore, animal bites and scratches, especially puncture wounds, carry a significant risk of infection.

Severe injuries, such as multiple bites, deep or gaping lacerations, wounds with excessive or continuous bleeding, wounds which are severely painful, and puncture wounds, should receive immediate medical attention. Injuries that initially appear minor may become severe due to infection within 24 hours. Signs of infection include increasing pain, swelling, redness, drainage of pus, chills, fever, and red streaks.

Parents must be notified of any animal-inflicted injury immediately.

Don't Panic! Just Follow these Steps:

- **Remove** the child from any further danger by separating the child and the animal. If safe to do so, restrain the animal by placing it in its cage or enclosed area where it will not be able to hurt anyone else. **Do not attempt to restrain an unknown animal!** If you are unable to restrain the animal due to the risk of danger or the animal is avoiding you, immediately contact 911 or your local emergency number.
- **Apply first aid measures** to the child.
 - **First - Apply direct pressure** to bleeding areas until bleeding subsides. Immediately

WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MY ANIMALS AND IN TURN PROTECT THE CHILDREN?

- Have all animals fully examined by a veterinarian. Typically, neutering or spaying results in animals displaying calmer temperaments. Having animals vaccinated will reduce the potential of injured children suffering from illness beyond the wound.
- Handle all animals with gentleness and patience from the time they are very young. This will teach animals to feel more comfortable being touched and handled.
- If possible, train animals to obey commands such as “stop,” “stay,” “sit,” “come,” and “leave it.”
- Make sure that the animals are socialized to different people. Socialized animals will more likely be at ease around others, especially children, and be less likely to react defensively.
- Securely separate animals from children when either the animals or the children have tendencies to be aggressive (e.g., bite, hit or kick).
- Set aside a designated, secure, protected space for animals to relax without being bothered by children. When an animal feels threatened or bothered, it needs a place to retreat to be alone and safe. This will also prevent the animal from becoming lost or hit by automobiles. Animals that are enclosed in protected areas are also less likely to wander away to encounter and injure children they may not know.
- Always supervise children to assure they interact appropriately with animals.
- Be aware of the animal's behavior. Usually pet owners know their animals well enough to predict some behaviors. If an animal seems angry, fearful or temperamental, move the animal to a safe place away from the children.
- Have all animals on leashes or in harnesses while walking them.

call 911 or your local emergency number for medical assistance if a severe injury has occurred to a child or if you are unable to control bleeding with direct pressure.

- **Second - Thoroughly cleanse** the wound by washing it with soap and water.
- **Third - Apply a loose sterile dressing** to the wound.
- **Follow up** by contacting the following people:
 - The child's parents/guardians must be immediately notified of the injury and whether medical attention will be obtained. If needed, coordinate the destination of the injured child and the means of transportation.

Preferred destinations for medical attention should be indicated by the parents on the child's information card and may include a hospital emergency department, an urgent care center, or a family physician's office.

In cases of serious injury, the child may need to be transported to the hospital in ambulance.

- Your veterinarian should be notified about your animal's behavior if your animal caused the injury.
- Your local animal control unit may need to be involved depending on the injury. Agents from animal control will be able to verify the rabies vaccination record of animals required by law to be immunized. Authorities may also require the animal to be quarantined for up to 10 days to assess the animal's behavior. In cases of unknown animals, animal control may attempt to capture the animal. It may be helpful if you are able to describe the animal's size, color, breed, where it came from, or in what direction it departed.

- Your licensing consultant needs to be quickly informed of any incident requiring emergency care or hospitalization of children in your care. Licensing will evaluate the safety of the children and determine the course of action necessary to maintain compliance with licensing rules and regulations.

Division of Child Care Licensing

www.michigan.gov/michildcare



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